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LEGISLATOR TOLD OF A SOVIET ALERT

U.S. Intelligence Officials Say
Move in Far East Followed
Reagan's Quip on War

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 12 — American intelligence officials have told a Democratic congressman that two days after President Reagan made a joke about bombing the Soviet Union, a low-level Soviet military official ordered an alert of some of his troops in the Far East.

An aide to the Congressman, Representative Michael D. Barnes of Maryland, said today that the alert was said to have been canceled 30 minutes later by higher authority.

The aide said the intelligence officials had contended the alert was "a non-event."

Report in Japanese Paper

First reports of the Soviet alert were carried by the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun two weeks ago. The paper asserted that United States and Japanese forces had gone on alert in response.

But according to the aide to Mr. Barnes, the intelligence officials said the episode was so minor that no American or Japanese forces were put on any special alert status.

On Aug. 11 Mr. Reagan, preparing for his regular Saturday afternoon radio broadcast, quipped in a microphone test that he had "signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever" and that "we begin bombing in five minutes." Reports of what he said began to appear later that day and were widely circulated the next day. In Western Europe many commentators were sharply critical of Mr. Reagan and what they said the remark suggested about his thinking.

'Unclassified' Briefing Sought

After reading of the Japanese press account in The Baltimore Sun, Mr. Barnes sought a briefing from the Defense Department. But his aide said the briefing lacked much detail because Mr. Barnes insisted on receiving an "unclassified" briefing so that he could make public what he learned.

The intelligence officials also contended there was no proof the Soviet alert had anything to do with Mr. Reagan's quip.

Mr. Barnes himself has not commented on what he has been told. But House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., Democrat of Massachusetts, issued a statement today saying that it had been confirmed that Soviet military units went on "war alert" after Mr. Reagan's remarks of Aug. 11. Mr. Barnes's aide said Mr. O'Neill's office apparently misunderstood what was told to Mr. Barnes.

Mr. O'Neill contended in the statement issued in his name that the event showed that "we need a president who can apply himself competently to the frightening realities of the nuclear arms race and the need to end that race."

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